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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH IMMEDIATE 9025
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RIYADH 001889

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SUBJECT: GCC "100 PERCENT" BEHIND PROPOSED MIDDLE EAST
PEACE CONFERENCE

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) foreign ministers met on September 1, 2007, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia for their 104th session, which was led by Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Nizar Madani. The resulting communique renounced terrorism, reiterated the GCC's position that the region must be free of all weapons of mass destruction, expressed support for Iraq's national reconciliation efforts, called on Iran to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency and Lebanon to respect the legitimate political process, and expressed support for resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and President Bush's July 16 call for an international peace conference. Head of Saudi MFA's GCC Division told PolOff on September 4 that the GCC is "100 percent" behind the President's initiative, which was echoed by GCC Assistant Director General For Political Affairs Dr. Abdulkarim Hamadi on September 5. Both expressed concern about Iranian influence, but Dr. Hamadi suggested that the situation has somewhat improved. END SUMMARY.

104th GCC MINISTERS' COUNCIL

12. (U) GCC foreign ministers met on September 1, 2007, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia for their 104th session. According to the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), participants included Qatari Minister of State for Foreign Relations Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mahmoud, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed Al-Sabah, UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Mohammed Al-Shi'ali, Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid Al-Khalifa, and Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Yusef bin Alawi. The session was led by Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Nizar Madani.

13. (U) SPA releases indicated that in his opening remarks, Dr. Madani noted the Palestinian problem and emphasized the need for Hamas and Fatah to commit to the pledge they made in Makkah to stop fighting one another. He also reaffirmed support for Iraq's "unity, independence, sovereignty, security, stability, and Arab/Islamic affiliation." Additionally, Madani emphasized the necessity of standing by Lebanon, condemning acts that threaten its security and stability, and referred to Iran as a "dear neighbor." Madani continued that the GCC wants to develop "relations of

fraternity and cooperation" with Iran based on mutual respect and "non-interference in internal affairs."

GCC COMMUNIQUE

¶4. (U) At the conclusion of the ministers' session, a statement was issued that urged the completion of the necessary requirements to effect a Common Gulf Market. The communiqué renounced the violence and extremism associated with terrorism and expressed support for all efforts to combat terrorism. The ministers called on Iran to work with the International Agency for Atomic Energy to address issues relating to its nuclear program and reiterated the GCC's position that the region be free from all weapons of mass destruction. However, the GCC continues to endorse the right of all countries to "possess expertise in the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes."

¶5. (U) The ministers supported Iraq's national reconciliation efforts and called on its neighbors to assist Iraq in enhancing its security and stability. The communiqué called for a "just and comprehensible peace settlement" to the Arab-Israeli conflict, supported President Bush's July 16 call for an international conference to address these issues, and stressed that all countries concerned with the peace process should attend the conference. The statement further called on all Lebanese parties to "return to national dialogue and unification of ranks," as well as to respect the "legitimate political process" and the Lebanese constitution.

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GCC 100 PERCENT BEHIND PRESIDENT'S INITIATIVE

¶6. (C) Head of Saudi MFA's GCC Department Abdullah Al-Shamarani told PolOff on September 4 that the GCC is "100 percent" behind President Bush's call for an international conference to discuss the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Al-Shamarani highlighted the consistency between the President's initiative and King Abdullah's Peace Plan, adding that "this is the only solution." He expressed great optimism that this conflict could be addressed, specifically citing the recent meetings between Palestinian President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert as sending a strong signal that both sides are finally serious about finding a resolution. He continued that "President Bush is the key to making this happen," stating that the President has enough influence with the Israelis, whom he described as "too stubborn," to secure their substantive participation. Addressing the Arab/Israeli issue, said Shamarani, is key to resolving every other regional conflict, adding that the propagation of extremist thinking would also be virtually eliminated because there would no longer be an "excuse" for terrorism.

¶7. (C) GCC Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs Dr. Abdulkarim Hamadi echoed Al-Shamari's statements during a September 5 meeting with PolOff, welcoming the meetings between Olmert and Abbas as a positive step. However, he cautioned that the Palestinians must first resolve their "internal problems" and regretted that Hamas and Fatah had not kept the oath they made in Makkah to refrain from violence against each other. Dr. Hamadi also expressed support for the President's proposed conference, emphasizing the importance for regional entities to participate in this forum.

IRANIAN INFLUENCE A PROBLEM -- BUT PROGRESS??

18. (C) In a joint press conference following the GCC ministers' session, Dr. Madani stated that there is unanimity among GCC states that issues relating to Iran must be solved through peaceful -- not military -- means, which was echoed by Dr. Hamadi. While both Hamadi and Al-Shamarani expressed serious concern about Iranian influence in the region and its nuclear program, they both emphasized that the only recourse is through diplomatic intervention. Al-Shamarani frankly stated that the Iranians "need to change their position," and Dr. Hamadi said that economic pressures would necessitate their cooperation with other countries in the region. Both brushed off President Ahmadinejad's recent statement that Iran would fill the void in Iraq in the U.S.' absence, stating unequivocally that "Iran is already there."

19. (C) Despite concerns about Iran, Dr. Hamadi described the situation as having "somewhat improved" recently. He pointed to statements by the U.S. and France denying that military action against Iran is imminent, and said these declarations have had a positive affect on Tehran. "They feel less threatened," he said, and suggested that sustained diplomatic engagement is necessary. Al-Shamarani and Hamadi agreed that military action against Iran would have a detrimental impact on all of its neighbors.

COMMENT

10. (C) The GCC's very public and seemingly unqualified support of an international conference to discuss the Arab/Israeli peace process signals a clear closing of the regional ranks. Our interlocutors continue to convey that resolving the conflict between Israel and Palestine would go a long way to addressing most of the region's other crises -- and with the growing Iranian threat, this message has become even more strident. Hence, it is logical that the Saudis, who have leveraged their regional leadership role to push King Abdullah's Peace Plan, would see a peace conference as an opportunity to continue this push. Obtaining the clear

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support of the GCC for such a conference not only insulates them from accusations that they are acting at the USG's behest, but it also "legitimizes" broader Arab participation in this forum. END COMMENT.
FRAKER